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NEWS

Winchester High School students share experiences of exchange trip to France

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Winchester High School students share their experiences of an exchange trip to France in February 2025. WINCHESTER NEWS STAFF PHOTO/KRYSTAL NGUYEN

Winchester students are back from France — and they're sharing

great time they had.

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The Winchester High School French Department and the Winchester Jumelage this month collaborated on a presentation at the Griffin Museum to highlight the recent exchange trip to Winchester's sister city in France.

In February, 24 WHS French students embarked on a 12-day trip to Saint-Germain-en-Laye, a suburb outside of Paris comparable to Winchester's proximity to Boston.

Students stayed with host families from Institut Notre Dame, having been paired with their French counterparts the previous September when French students visited Winchester in October 2024.

The recent presentation focused on the American side of the trip in France, led by French teacher Erin Foley and History Department Head Chris Kurjhaetz. Five students volunteered to present at the Griffin Museum event: Celia Swan Lavery, Mer Procops, Jonno Gilmer, Luke Molloy, and Bowen Peng.

Students described their immersive educational experience at Institut Notre Dame, where they spent three days fully integrated into the French school system, shadowing their counterparts' schedules.

"There were significant differences between our schools," explained Swan Lavery. "Institut Notre Dame is a private Catholic school where classes followed a more lecture-style format without the group work we're used to at WHS."

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WHS students Celia Swan Lavery, Mer Procops, Jonno Gilmer, Luke Molloy, and Bowen Peng shared their experiences from a trip to France during a 12-day exchange in February. WINCHESTER NEWS STAFF PHOTO/KRYSTAL NGUYEN

Students noted the strict electronics policy at the French school, where phones were prohibited and very few students used computers, creating a notably different learning environment from their technology-integrated American classrooms.

Over the weekend, students were presented with opportunities for authentic cultural experiences with host families. Swan Lavery explored Parisian neighborhoods with her host family and other students, visiting French thrift stores and sampling local cuisine.

Swan Lavery also went into Paris with her host family and ended up seeing the Notre Dame Cathedral three days in a row.

Procops and Molloy engaged in various activities with their respe
families like bouldering and driving on local roads.

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Peng toured the Louvre and experienced Paris at night, witnessing the twinkling lights of the Eiffel Tower.

The program's more structured itinerary began the following Monday, when students navigated the Paris Metro to visit the Louvre and the Conciergerie, where Marie Antoinette was imprisoned before her execution. They also viewed Notre Dame Cathedral and spent the afternoon learning to play pétanque, a traditional French game similar to bocce.

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Tuesday featured a particularly moving experience as both American and French students traveled together by bus to Normandy.

At the American Cemetery, they participated in a wreath-laying ceremony commemorating the enduring Franco-American relationship. A French student and an American student together placed the wreath, symbolizing the friendship between the two nations.

Students also had the opportunity to walk around the cemetery grounds and visit historic Omaha Beach.

"It's one thing to learn about D-Day in class, but being there gave us a completely different understanding," Peng said, of the experience.

On Wednesday, students climbed the Eiffel Tower to its highest observation deck, followed by climbing the stairs to the top of the Arc de Triomphe. Students then enjoyed shopping time along the Champs-Élysées before concluding the day with a scenic cruise down the Seine River.

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The exchange program's final full day centered on the Palace of Versailles, where students received a guided tour of the historic royal residence. After lunch in a neighboring town, they returned to explore the palace's extensive gardens via tram.

The night ended with a farewell dinner planned by history teacher Caroline Bernoux and Anglophone section head Donnamarie O'Reilly. They played a slideshow of the memorable moments from both the French students' time in the United States and the American students' experiences in France, followed by the distribution of goodie bags for the Winchester students to bring home.

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WHS French teacher Erin Foley speaks during the presentation by students about their exchange trip to France in February. WINCHESTER NEWS STAFF PHOTO/KRYSTAL NGUYEN

During the question-and-answer session at the Griffin Museum presentation, students reflected on how living with host families

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them with unique cultural insights that would have been impossible to gain as tourists.

“Going around with our host families gave us a new perspective and allowed us to fully immerse ourselves in the culture,” Peng said. “Even though some of us had been to Europe before, none of us had truly experienced living in a European home.”

The students expressed particular fascination with Europe's rich historical landscape.

“European architecture and monuments are so much more historical than what we have in the United States,” Gilmer noted. “We even got to see buildings older than the entire town of Winchester itself!”

When asked about the most rewarding aspects of the exchange, most panel members agreed it was the opportunity to practice their French language skills with native speakers in authentic settings.

The WHS French Department and the Winchester Jumelage hope to continue this tradition that has enriched the language education of Winchester students for decades.

Krystal Nguyen is a Winchester High School student, who is currently interning at Winchester News.

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The following was submitted by the Office of Rep. Michael S. Day: Rep. Michael S. Day and his colleagues in the House of Representatives recently passed energy affordability legislation that would result in over $9 billion in savings for utility ratepayers over the next 10 years. The bill maintains critical

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The following was submitted by the Office of Sen. Jason Lewis: State Sen. Jason Lewis joined his colleagues in the Massachusetts Senate to pass legislation that protects residents from discrimination in the housing market as the Trump administration abandons its enforcement of the federal Fair Housing Act. Illegal discrimination continues

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The following was submitted by the Network for Social Justice: To mark Women's History Month and International Women's Day in 2026, the Network for Social Justice is collaborating with club leaders from Winchester High School and members of the Community Health team from La Colaborativa in Chelsea and

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FEATURES

‘Chicago: Teen Edition’ dances onto the Winchester High School stage

By Talia Ho | Correspondent Fame. Fortune. And all that jazz. This spring, Winchester High School presents “Chicago: Teen Edition,” a bold musical that explores celebrity culture, media manipulation, and the cost of ambition. Set in the 1920s, this iconic production is sure to leave the audience wanting more. Performances will

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Ripley Chapel in Winchester presents ‘Syldason: You Are Welcome Here’

The following was submitted by the Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church: On Friday, March 13, beginning at 7:30 p.m., live in-person and live streamed from the stunning Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church, Winchester, 21 Church St., join in with Syldason, a duo concert featuring Sylvie Zakarian,

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